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# PROCEEDINGS

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### LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE AND SHIFT

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## TRANSLATION IGNORANCE: A CASE STUDY OF BILINGUAL SIGNS

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### ABSTRACT

*As a country that is famous for her natural beauty and friendly people, Indonesia becomes one of world tourism destinations and many foreign people visit this country. In order to provide better service, many bilingual public signs, Indonesian – English, are placed in public areas. Unfortunately, due to structural and cultural differences between Indonesian and English, the intention of providing information is often hampered. Further, because of translation ignorance there are many misleading bilingual public signs that may create confusion. In fact, public signs, regardless the language command, should evoke similar effect to the readers so that the terms used should be familiar to the target readers. On the other hand, there is no standard in translating public sign so that different public facilities may put different version for similar sign. This paper is going to map the method of translation applied in translating signs in several public areas in Surabaya and analyse the common mistake of the signs. It is expected that people realise the importance of proper bilingual signs and the authorities will pay more attention to the translation activity, especially in producing bilingual signs and thus reducing translation ignorance.*

### 1. Introduction

Surabaya is the second biggest city in Indonesia and establishes itself as an industrious and shopping city because it has no natural resorts. Surabaya also tries to attract more and more foreigners by upgrading Juanda airport to an international one, providing star hotels, public facilities, entertainment centers and many more. In fact, every May, Surabaya always holds a big sale event in which many big malls offer big discounts in a bid to celebrate the city's anniversary. As a consequence, the number of foreigners visiting or living in Surabaya increases. The existence of bilingual public sign, in this case Indonesian as the source language (SL) and English as the target language (TL) as a product of communication, is essential to the foreigners and it also influences the city's international profile. Thus, the appropriate public sign translation not only showing the quality of the city but also the language awareness of the residents.

Unfortunately, there is no essay discussing bilingual public sign in Indonesia yet even though there are some comments posted on the internet regarding bilingual public sign in some cities in Indonesia. The focus of those comments is usually about inappropriateness of English translation on public sign. Therefore, there is an assumption that bilingual public signs might create misunderstanding to foreigners who are the target readers of English public sign. The purpose of putting bilingual public signs is for foreigners' convenience so that the translated text should be easily understood by them and there is a need to prevent the opposite to happen.

Newmark proposed several methods of translation that can be divided into loyal to the source text and to the target text. The methods will be applied in mapping the methods of I-E translation of public signs and further analysing the common mistakes identified from the point of view of skopostheory. Skopostheory is putting the purpose of target text into utmost consideration and the purpose or the *skopos* determines the most appropriate translation strategies instead of the source text. Skopostheory is also an advisable translation theory for translating public sign into English. Based on Newmark and Vermeer's theory, this paper maps the translation methods used in bilingual public signs, take some examples to analyse the acceptability of the translation by considering the purpose of translation and the target text readers as principles of skopostheory.

### SIGNS AND METHOD OF TRANSLATION

Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia defined sign as a signal or guideline (2005: 925). Oxford English Dictionary, on the other hand, defined sign as a characteristic device attached to or placed in front of an inn or shop, as a means of distinguishing it from others or directing attention to it; in later use commonly a board bearing a name or other inscriptions with or without some ornament or picture. Actually, sign is a broad term and widely use in public facilities, involving accommodation, recreation, shopping, medical



service, educational institution, financial service, etc. According to *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* public sign is a lettered board or other public display placed on or before a building, room, shop or office to advertise business there transacted or the name of the person or firm conducting it.

It is generally agreed that public sign provide information, instruction, reference and warning (Ko, Leong 2010). Some scholars divide functions of public sign into four: directive, restrictive, mandatory/compelling and informative (Hua Huang 2007; Xuanming and Tuwang Li 2006). In addition, Indonesian Land Transport Minister Decree no, 61 year 1993 also mentions four basic functions of signs: rambu peringatan, larangan, perintah, dan rambu petunjuk kepada pemakai jalan (<http://www.kcdj.org/forums/lofiversion/index.php?t916.html>).

Directive public sign is also called instructive/guiding notice which gives readers information without any restriction and the public is not demanded to take any action concerning the information. For example: *rumah sakit – hospital, aula – hall, kamar kecil – toilet*, etc.

Restrictive public sign is put to restrict people's behaviour and action yet not dictating. For example: *exit – keluar, dorong – push, tarik – pull*. This kind of public sign is often found in public transports and public facilities.

Mandatory public sign demands people to take necessary action or obey some rules or giving warning. It usually uses words like "No", "Prohibited", "Not Allowed" and gives no room for negotiation. Therefore, people are expected to follow the sign. For example: *dilarang merokok – no smoking, dilarang membawa makanan dan minuman dari luar – no outside food and beverages are allowed, khusus karyawan – staff only*.

Informative public sign is used to indicate something or inform people on things deem necessary for them to know. For example *sedang dalam perbaikan – temporarily out of service, tutup pintu selalu – keep door closed, awas lantai basah – caution wet floor*. This kind of public sign do not suggest any obligation and people may or may not take any action regarding the information.

Public sign itself, whether one language and bilingual, has limited space so that the text placed should be concise, straightforward, clear and easy to understand. The aspect of limited space and characters put in a public sign along with the intended target readers should become the translator's main consideration.

Regarding the production of translation of text from one language into another language, Newmark (1988b) proposes several method of translation for sentences and the smaller units of language as follow:

- *Word-for-word translation*: in which the SL word order is preserved and the words translated singly by their most common meanings, out of context.
- *Literal translation*: in which the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are again translated singly, out of context.
- *Faithful translation*: it attempts to produce the precise contextual meaning of the original within the constraints of the TL grammatical structures.
- *Semantic translation*: which differs from 'faithful translation' only in as far as it must take more account of the aesthetic value of the SL text.
- *Adaptation*: which is the freest form of translation, and is used mainly for plays (comedies) and poetry; the themes, characters, plots are usually preserved, the SL culture is converted to the TL culture and the text is rewritten.
- *Free translation*: it produces the TL text without the style, form, or content of the original.
- *Idiomatic translation*: it reproduces the 'message' of the original but tends to distort nuances of meaning by preferring colloquialisms and idioms where these do not exist in the original.
- *Communicative translation*: it attempts to render the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership (1988b: 45-47).

Newmark (1991:10-12) also writes of a continuum existing between "semantic" and "communicative" translation. Any translation can be "more, or less semantic—more, or less, communicative—even a particular section or sentence can be treated more communicatively or less semantically.

On the other hand, Vermeer that forwarded *skopostheory* defines translation in Snell Hornby (1995: p.46) as:

...information offered of information in a language z of the culture Z which imitates information offered in language A of culture A so as to fulfill the desired function. That means that a translation is not the transcoding of words or sentences from one language into another, but a complex action in which someone provides information about a text under new functional, cultural and linguistic conditions and in a new situation, whereby formal characteristics are imitated as far as possible.

Thus Vermeer through his theory emphasized that translation is an action motivated by the *purpose* or *skopos* of the action. The theory also perceived translator as an expert, bilingual and bicultural, so that s/he can build a bridge of understanding from the source text into the target text.

Differs from linguistic approach that stresses on the equivalence of words and sentences, the functional approach or in this case *skopos* theory focuses on the translator and gives both bigger freedom and responsibility to the translator to produce a target text which conforms to the expectations and needs of the target reader.

Further, Munday (2001: p. 79) summed up some basic rules of skopostheory as follow:

1. A *translatum* (or TT) is determined by its *skopos*.
2. A TT is an offer of information (*informationsangebot*) in a target culture and TL concerning an offer of information in a source culture and SL.
3. A TT does not initiate an offer of information in a clearly reversible way.
4. A TT must be internally coherent.
5. A TT must be coherent with the ST.
6. The five rules above stand in hierarchical order, with the *skopos* rule predominating.

## 2. Bilingual Sign in Public Areas

Public signs possess a strategic position as an information for people to do or not to do things related to the message conveyed by the signs. In all countries, public signs can be easily found and their meanings are more or less similar such as giving direction, mentioning place or location, guiding way of using ATM machine, etc. Further, the visual effect of public sign is also often similar such as human figure with pants for men's toilet and human figure with skirt for women's toilet or a cross in the middle of a handphone indicates a prohibition to use handphone in the area. On the other hand, the text arrangement on public sign is not as universal as the picture or visual use in it even though the message is actually the same. Despite similar use of roman alphabets, Indonesian and English are two different languages with different grammar, structure and also culture. Therefore, due to these differences, necessary adjustment is needed in translating public sign.

An analysis on the data indicates that the translation methods applied in bilingual public signs are word for word, literal and communicative methods. Though single word or expression does not pose any problem, longer text in bilingual public signs may create some misunderstanding. Further, ignorance on the structure and culture of the TL may also hinder expected reaction or understanding of the target readers.

## 3. Word for Word Translation Method

One word public sign is usually translated using word for word translation method. This kind of method relies on dictionary's definition without considering the context. Vinay and Dalbérnet considered as the most common method between languages of the same family and culture of translation (Munday, 2008). This method is considered valid for kernel sentence translation or single word. For example: *buka* – *open*, *tutup* – *close*, *tarik* – *pull*, *dorong* – *push*, etc. There is no room for mistake for this kind of translation since the SL and TL uses similar word class and fulfils the purpose of informing people of what they suppose to do.

## 4. Literal Translation

For public sign that comprises of long text, the most common method used is literal translation, in which the the SL grammatical constructions are converted to their nearest TL equivalents, but the lexical words are translated singly, out of context.

### Example:

Indonesian	: Pengunjung yang terhormat, pastikan barang-barang Anda tidak tertinggal
English	: Dear Valued Guest, please do not leave your valuables behind
Indonesian	: Mohon tunjukkan tiket dan identitas diri kepada petugas

English : Show your ticket and ID card please

The example above indicating that every single word is translated in accordance to dictionary's definition, out of context. The register of addressing third party is translated without considering the common term in English. The word *terhormat* is a common greeting term for Indonesian and the English translation should be *esteemed, respected, honored* (Echols, John M and Shadily Hasan, p.213). The sign is put in a women's toilet in a shopping mall so that it addresses anyone using the facility. The translator uses the word *valued* which means *yang dihargai (of a friend)* (Echols, John M and Shadily Hasan, p.626) and s/he may generalised that the meaning of *yang dihargai* is similar to *yang terhormat*. S/he also neglects the fact that there is a certain term for greetings in English. Further, the word *guest* means *tamu* which is quite different from *pengunjung* which address broad crowd visiting a place without anyone knowing anyone else. Despite inappropriate dictionary translation, the structure of the TL is adjusted accordingly so that the meaning of the text is understood. This kind of translation may result in creating an image of language ignorance in part of the management of the public facility in particular and the regional government in general.

**Example:**

Indonesian : Ruang menyusui bayi

English : Nursery room

This bilingual sign is put on the wall of a blurred glass-walled room to indicate the function of the room. The room is provided for mothers who need to breast-feed their babies in private, out of other people's eyes. The TL for the sign is *nursery room* and there is a reverse position of the noun from the initial to the final position. Therefore, the method of translation for this sign is literal translation. Unfortunately, the meaning of nursery is *kamar anak-anak* and even *kebun bibit* (ibid p.399) which is quite different from the ST meaning. Therefore, the translator may make generalisation in translating which may result in misunderstanding. This kind of translation may indicate the incompetence of the translator and/or the ignorance of the management of the facility.

## 5.Communicative Translation

Since 2008 Surabaya has issued a regulation that forbid people to lit cigarettes in public areas. As a consequence there are many public signs that remind people not to smoke or indicate places to smoke. Due to no standardization, similar expression may have various text arrangements. The examples are below:

Indonesian : Dilarang merokok

English : No smoking

Indonesian : Kawasan tanpa rokok

English : Smoking is strictly prohibited by law

Indonesian : Area dilarang merokok

English : No smoking area

The most common translation of public sign *dilarang merokok* is *no smoking*. The translation is using communicative translation method which renders the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. Though *dilarang* means *prohibited* in English but the translated text is *no smoking* which back translation is *tidak merokok*. English speaking people perceive sign *no smoking* as a mandatory not to smoke and it is considered a common term instead of *prohibited to smoke*. Thus, the reaction of Indonesians reading a sign *dilarang merokok* is similar to the reaction of English speaking people reading a sign *no smoking*.

**Example:**

Indonesian : Utamakan tempat duduk bagi orang sakit, orang hamil dan manula

English : Priority for difable, pregnant and senior citizen

The example above is taken from a bus transport and is placed right above some chairs. The strategy for traslating the sentence is communicative by using the term *senior citizen* for *manula*. Manula stands for manusia lanjut usia or old age man (literal translation) but the translation is *senior citizen* which is a more common expression in English for old people. This public sign translation shows that the translator is quite aware of the structure and culture of English language. On the other hand, the diction *difable* is not a common term in English for it is a term created by Indonesian handicapped organisation and is not listed in any English dictionary. Thus, native English speakers may not fully understand the meaning eventhough they may guess the meaning from the context. Further, the translation of the phrase *orang hamil* with *pregnant* is not appropriate since the common term used in English is pregnant woman. Eventhough it seems redundant, the translator should be aware of the necessity of putting noun after

adjective to send clear message. In short, the translation of public sign does not only considering the limited space but also the target readers and the acceptability in structure and culture of the TL.

**Example:**

Indonesian	: Tangga darurat
English	: Fire Exit
Indonesia	: Pintu darurat
English	: Exit

The translation of the two different phrase is applying the same word **exit**. The first example is a bilingual sign put near a *stair* and the translation is *fire exit* without indicating the word *stair* or *steps*. Despite the difference in structure and words, both texts indicate the function of the means, in this case a stair, as a way out in case of emergency, i.e. fire. Thus, the translator serves the function of the text as a reference. The second example is *pintu darurat* which is simply translated into an English *exit*. The omission strategy on this translation is dangerous since the translation does not serve the purpose of the sign which is telling the readers to use the door in case of emergency only. The translation *exit* indicating that the readers could use the door as a means to leave the building at any condition. It can be said that the translator failed to serve the function of the translation and ignore the target readers reaction on the translation.

## 6. Conclusion

Along with the increasing number of foreigners coming to Surabaya, there is an urgent need to place bilingual public signs in public areas. The suggested method of translating public sign is communicative method in which the translator should try to transfer the exact contextual meaning of the original in such a way that both content and language are readily acceptable and comprehensible to the readership. Further, the translator should also pay attention to the purpose of the translation so that the intended meaning can be fully transferred and create expected reaction from the target readers. Unfortunately, the translation of long text public sign still creates confusion due to an ignorance on structure and culture of the TL, in this case English. Therefore, there is a need for the government to standardize or create an institution that monitor the translation of public sign since it is also reflecting the government's and people's awareness and respect to other language.

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